

6-15-1987

On the Nature of Evil: The Cosmic Myths of Lewis, Tolkien and Williams

Vernon Hyles

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore>Part of the [Children's and Young Adult Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hyles, Vernon (1987) "On the Nature of Evil: The Cosmic Myths of Lewis, Tolkien and Williams," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 13 : No. 4 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol13/iss4/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mythopoeic Society at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature by an authorized editor of SWOSU Digital Commons. An ADA compliant document is available upon request. For more information, please contact phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu.

To join the Mythopoeic Society go to:
<http://www.mythsoc.org/join.htm>



Mythcon 51: A VIRTUAL “HALFLING” MYTHCON

July 31 - August 1, 2021 (Saturday and Sunday)

<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/mythcon-51.htm>



Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico; July 29 - August 1, 2022

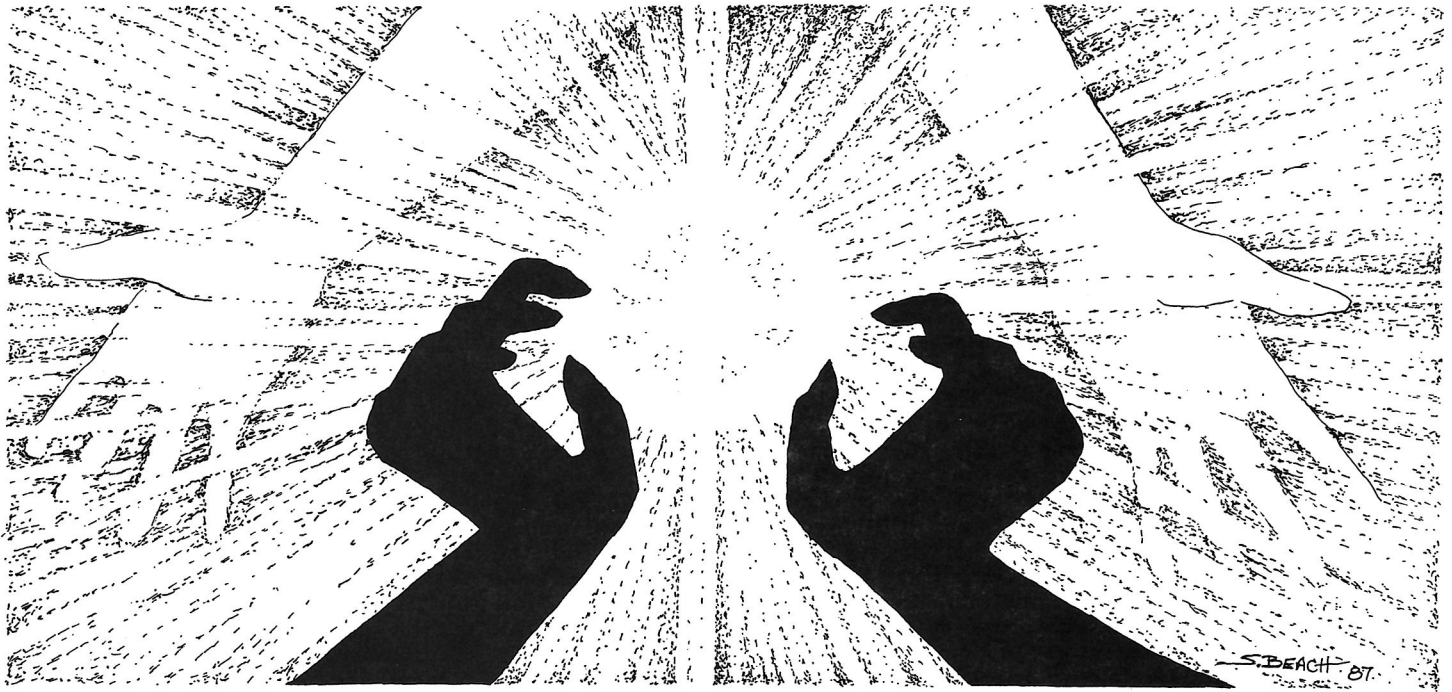
<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythcon/mythcon-52.htm>

Abstract

Examines the works of Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams for what they have to say about the nature of evil in their fiction, particularly as it relates to Christian scripture and eschatology.

Additional Keywords

Evil, nature of, in C.S. Lewis; Evil, nature of, in Charles Williams; Evil, nature of, in J.R.R. Tolkien



On the Nature of Evil

The Cosmic Myths of Lewis, Tolkien & Williams

Vernon Hyles

Like all Christians, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams had to reach a dialectic in order to accept the presence of evil in a world created by an omniscient and beneficent God. Each developed that dialectic in a different way. For Lewis, the confrontation with evil and his explanation for its existence comes in The Screwtape Letters (1943) and shows that Lewis was well acquainted with Hell. The antithesis is revealed in Lewis' The Great Divorce (1946), an extraordinary narrative of a journey through the Heaven of Lewis' own intellectual vision; however, it was the so-called "Ransom Trilogy" (Out of the Silent Planet, 1943, Perelandra, 1944, That Hideous Strength, 1946) that both codified and clarified Lewis' cosmology. For Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings became the vehicle through which the writer could add support to the old myths and recreate new ones which would strengthen the Christian Apocalyptic vision and prove mythopoetically Biblical eschatology. For Williams, his novels reflect how power, the power of good and evil, the power of love, the power of objects and things, can be a vehicle for the essential goodness or for its antithesis which misuses and perverts power. All three attempted to use fantasy as the language through which the problems of and the identification of good and evil could be solved and pinpointed. Each accomplished his end in his own manner.

The theories of the nature of evil extend over the boundaries of many sciences or subject matters. They occupy a place in metaphysics and literature. They are of fundamental importance in all the moral sciences, ethics, economics, politics, and law. They appear in all of the sciences of human behavior such as psychology and sociology, and, to a lesser degree, in the natural sciences, though it is treated differ-

ently and is of less importance. In that part of theology in which C.S. Lewis concerns himself which goes beyond metaphysics and moral philosophy, we meet with the concept of infinite goodness and purity -- the goodness and purity of a supreme being --verses the concept of infinite evil -- the evil of Satan --and we then face the problem of how God's goodness is to be understood by man and how the ultimate evil is to be explained in the face of this infinite goodness. The theological problem which is traditionally called the problem of evil concerns the whole universe in its relation to the divine. How, then, are we to understand the existence to evil in a world created by a God who is omnipotent and perfectly good?

In Lewis' trilogy, this problem of the explanation of evil is accomplished by allegorically creating an Eden, Perelandra, before corruption, a creator, Maleldil the Young, and an excuse for evil in the best eldila of Thulcandra. Lewis explains the existence of evil in worlds in which the God reigns by assigning actuality and truth to all the myths. If there exists a God with servants and prophets and followers, there must also exist an infinite evil with its prophets, servants, and followers. This can be accepted if the myth of the struggle between God and Satan is fact. As Ransom contemplated the existence of the King and Queen of Perelandra "he wondered also whether the King and Queen, though doubtless the first human pair of this planet, might on the physical side have a marine ancestry. And if so, what then of the man-like things before men in our own world? Must they in truth have been the wistful brutalities whose pictures we see in the popular books on evolution? Or were the old myths truer than the modern myths?" (Lewis, Per-

elandra, p. 102, hereafter referred to as Pere) Again Lewis explains in Perelandra that "the whole distinction between fact and myth was purely terrestrial." Pere, p. 147) In Lewis' cosmic myth, however, the existence of evil is taken on faith just as faith in God is considered a necessity in modern theology and is not in need of an explanation. "you remember," says Dr. Dimble in That Hideous Strength, "there dwell in the sky many kinds of wights. Some of them are good, and some work evil." (That Hideous Strength, p. 32, hereafter referred to as THS) In Perelandra, Lewis reiterates this point by saying "as there is one face above all worlds merely to see which is irrevocable joy, so at the bottom of all worlds that face is waiting whose sight alone in the misery from which none who beholds it can recover." (Pere, p. 111) The myth of the ancient world, then, Lewis holds to be true, and he parallels these myths in his trilogy. Malacandra is the ancient world in which Oyarsa has conquered the bent Oyarsa and all the ideals which man considers best are true. The Hrossa, Seroni, and Pfifltriggi all live together as "Hnau" doing what they do best, content and happy. There exists in Lewis' mythology an Eden uncorrupted by Evil and an Eve as yet untempted; however, the evil does come in the body of Weston and to some extent even Ransom, and the temptation and fall is retold in Perelandran terms. In this instance, though, the temptation is thwarted by Perelandra's Christ, Ransom. "For it seems to us," says the green lady, "that Maleldil sent you into our world at that day when the time of our being young drew to its end, and from it we must now go up or down into corruption or into perfection. Maleldil has taken us where he meant us to be: but of Maleldil's instruments in this, you were the chief." (Pere, p. 208) Whereas Perelandra takes the way to perfection, Thulcandra, after the fall, must destroy evil through the second coming, in Lewis' myth the coming of Merlin and the resurrected Ransom. The dogma of Lewis also answers the prevalent theological question asking since God is good and since everything which happens is a result of providence and within God's power, how can we account for the sin of Satan or the fall of man, with all the evil consequent because of these, without limiting God's power or absolving the erring creature from responsibility?

The fundamental theme in the trilogy is the struggle between the qualities of good and the qualities of evil. On Mars, the Hnau had never fallen because of the protection of Oyarsa; on Venus, there was no Oyarsa for Maleldil was still in the process of making this world old. With the coming of Weston, the Eve of Perelandra was faced with the choices which would either permit her world to remain good, like Mars, or plunge it into division as is the case on Earth. The antagonists and protagonists are obvious. In Out of the Silent Planet, Weston is evil, for as Oyarsa says "he has left you this one because a bent hnau can do more evil than a broken one." (Out of the Silent Planet, p. 139, hereafter referred to as OSP) Oyarsa has seen "how the lord of the silent world has bent" Weston (OSP, p. 138). Ransom, because of his association with the hrossa, Oyarsa, and the eldils of deep heaven, is basically good. "They were all hnau. They has stood shoulder to shoulder in the face of an enemy... and he, even Ransom, had come through it and not been disgraced. He had grown up." (OSP, p. 81) In Perelandra, Weston again has become the vehicle of the bent Oyarsa. Weston himself says that "things (are) coming into my head. I'm being prepared all the time. Being made a fit receptacle for it." (Pere, p. 94) Later, Ransom witnesses Weston's dualism:

The horrible things began happening. A spasm like that preceding a deadly vomit twisted Weston's face out of recognition. As it passed, for one second something like the old Weston reappeared -- the old Weston, staring with eyes of horror and howling, "Ransom, Ransom! For Christ's sake don't let them --" and instantly his whole body spun round as it he had been hit by a revolver-bullet and he fell to the earth, and was there rolling at Ransom's feet, slaving and chattering and tearing up the moss by handfuls. (Pere, p. 96)

On Venus, too, Ransom was the Christ figure, the only intellect against the diabolical Un-Man. Ransom says, "I know you are feeling the absurdity of it. Dr. Elwin Ransom setting out single-handed to combat the powers and principalities. You may even be wondering if I've got megalomania." (Pere, p. 23) On Earth, the obvious protagonists were a small group of Christians headed by the resurrected Merlin and the Fisher-King, the resurrected Ransom. The antagonists were the group from N.I.C.E., backed by the bent eldils of Thulcandra. All of the qualities of evil seem to be represented by the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments in general and by its Deputy Director, Wither, in particular. He is an old man, signifying the age of evil and its activity since the fall; he is obese, showing the pervasiveness of evil; his eyes are weak and watery, paralleling the darkness of evil versus the light of good; he is, like evil, self-centered; and he is vague, symbolic of the amorphous quality of evil.

Myth, faith, and death are all a part of the theology created by Lewis. In truth, Lewis uses the universe to extend the idea that the Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Medieval myths are realities. "All the things which appeared as mythology on Earth are scattered through other worlds as realities." (Pere, p. 23) Unlike some Christian theologians, the Martians and Lewis do not look upon death as evil, but simply as one of the ways in which Maleldil works. Ransom explains faith in Maleldil's ways to the green lady and, in so doing, explains Christian faith.

In all these other matters what you call obeying Him is but doing what seems good in your own eyes also. Is love content with that? You do them, indeed, because they are His will, but not only because they are His will. Where can you taste the joy of obeying unless he bids you do something for which his bidding is the only reason? When we spoke last you said that if you told the beasts to walk on their heads, they would delight to do so. So I know that you understand well that I am saying. (Pere, p. 118)

The green lady replies, "We cannot walk out of Maleldil's will: but he has given us a way to walk out of our will." (Pere, p. 188)

Whereas Out of the Silent Planet treats the quality and truthfulness of myth and Perelandra the temptation of good by evil, That Hideous Strength concerns the actual war between the forces of good and evil. It is the evil Eldila of Earth who control the Head and the leaders at Belbury, just as Perelandra and the other Oyeresu of Deep Heaven control Ransom and the household at St. Anne's. The dark eldila of Earth believed that the seventh law which said that no inhabitants of Deep Heaven would ever come to

Earth until the end would protect their mission. Yet now it was revealed to Ransom that this law had been broken by the evil men in their contamination of the unfallen worlds, Mars and Venus. As the sides take shape, it is also revealed that the power of Maleldil could unmake all of Thulcandra, but it is His intention to work through a man. They use Merlin, a man who understands the good and evil use of magic, thus proving that God can create good out of evil.

Finally, the isolation of the Earth has allowed evil to become the dominant force on Thulcandra. All of its manifestations point to Lewis' personal philosophy as to the nature of evil. He contrasts the scientific viewpoint, Weston's, with the humanistic philosophy, Ransom's. It is easy to see what Lewis equates with scientific explanations and theories. Weston verbalizes the scientist's basic premise: "You cannot be so small-minded as to think that the rights or the life of an individual or of a million individuals are of the slightest importance in comparison to this." (OSP, p. 27) Lewis is also conscious of the corruptive powers of organized religion. It is possible, he says, to do much evil in the name of good. Ransom "had been haunted by a conscientious scruple as to whether it might not be his duty to undertake their religious instruction; now, as a result of his tentative efforts, he found himself being treated as if he were the savage and being given a first sketch of civilized religion." (OSP, p. 68) The centuries of control of the Earth by the bent eldila have also fostered evil ideas and instincts upon mankind.

At last it dawned upon him that it was not they, but his own species, that were the puzzle. That the hrossa should have such instincts was mildly surprising; but how close it that the instincts of the hrossa so closely resembled the unattained ideas of that far-divided species Man whose instincts were so deplorably different. (OSP, p. 74)

If we are to believe in devils and witches and bent eldils, and does Lewis, we must see some outward sign of their work. Lewis mentions many places in which evil does its work materially, thus giving us some insight as to its nature. First, it is sly and cunning, for as Ransom says, "Oh, they'll put all sorts of things into your head (speaking of the best eldils) if you let them. The best plan is to make no notice and keep straight on. Don't try to answer them. They like drawing you into an interminable argument." (Pere, p. 21) Secondly, evil takes that which is good and right and twists it into something foul and horrible. When the green lady says to Ransom, "I wonder if you were sent here to teach us death," (Pere, p. 67) we are reminded that on Mars, where there is no evil, death is logical and natural and without an evil connotation. As evil molds objects to its own end, so it does, too, with ideas. Weston says, "Your Devil and your God are both pictures of the same force. Your heaven is a picture of the perfect spirituality ahead; your hell a picture of the urge or nisus which is driving us on to it from behind. Hence the static peace of the one and the fire and darkness of the other." (Pere, p. 93-94) Evil tends, too, to replace God with man and put our faith and energy into terrestrial rather than heavenly ideas. Evil says, "Because the world is made up not only of what is but what might be. Maleldil knows both and wants us to know both." (Pere, p. 104) The Faustian theme is advanced again with Weston saying that "Since Piebald and I have come to your world we have put many things into your mind which Maleldil has not. Do you not see that He is letting go of your hand a little?" (Pere, p.

104) When Weston describes the woman of Thulcandra he describes the final outcome of replacing God with man: "Their minds run ahead of Maleldil had told them. They do not need to wait for him to tell them what is good, but know it for themselves as He does. They are, as it were, little Maleldils." (Pere, p. 106) Lewis emphasizes that evil is not necessarily compatible with our Christian concepts of its terror. "Ransom perceived that he had never before seen anything but half-hearted and uneasy attempts at evil. This creature (Weston) was whole-hearted. The extremity of its evil had passed beyond all struggle into some state which bore a horrible similarity to innocence." (Pere, p. 111) Even the most innocent calling of Ransom's name by the evil that is Weston is immeasurably wicked. The nature of evil is that it is attractive, fulfilling, to be desired. Temptation plays upon this weakness; the desire for the unknown, the forbidden. "This Piebald," says Weston, "does not want you to hear me, because he wants to keep you young. He does not want you to go on to the new fruits that you have never tasted before." (Pere, p. 113) Though evil accomplishes its ends at times, Lewis argues that even this is a victory for good. It is, then, the inherent nature of evil to, even though it gives semblances of beauty and truth and happiness, be less than what can come from good.

Of course good came of it. Is Maleldil a beast that we can stop his path, or a leaf that we can twist His shape? Whatever you do, He will make good of it. But not the good He had prepared for you if you had obeyed him. That is lost forever. The first King and first Mother of our world did the forbidden thing; and He brought good of it in the end. But what they did was not good; and what they lost we have not seen. And there were some to whom no good came nor ever will come. (Pere, p. 121)

Straik sums up the major aim of evil: delusion. "The kingdom of God is to be realized here -- in this world. And it will be. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow." (THS, p. 78) Filostrato says the same thing, the corruption of all good by evil, in different words. "Does it follow that because there was no God in the past that there will be no God also in the future?" (THS, p. 179)

Lewis' theology, especially his treatment of evil, runs a similar course with modern theological concepts, with one major difference. It is a prevalent belief in Christian circles that God is in His Heaven, Satan chained, and man is the master of his fate. There will be a judgement, but until then, as the Deists believed, the biological and eternal clock ticks away with little heavenly interference and no diabolical manifestations on Earth. Lewis, as has been indicated in the three novels making up his space trilogy, recognizes instead that evil and the effects of evil, the Devil and his servants, and the hosts of hell exist and function on Earth, shaping our lives as surely as God works his magic upon us.

Much of what Tolkien had to say concerning Biblical eschatology and the Apocalypse stemmed from this same interest in the received myths of Christianity. Lewis, indeed had never underestimated the power of myth; in fact, like Tolkien he was forever recalling the northern stories, especially the myth of the dying god Balder. He immediately recognized the tremendous role myth played both in language and literature, but he did not believe in the myths that so delighted him. For Lewis, these myths were beautiful

and moving but ultimately untrue. As he ultimately expressed it to Tolkien, myths are "lies and therefore worthless, even though breathed through silver." (Carpenter, The Inklings, p. 46) It was Tolkien's argument, though, that carried the day and eventually led Lewis to his discussion of Myths in the trilogy. Myths for Tolkien were not lies. All words, in fact all language is mythic. Objects that we are familiar with like trees and stars were named by primitive peoples whose outlook and view were different from the outlook and view of Lewis and Tolkien. To those first primitives, the world was alive with mythological beings. To them the whole world was, as Tolkien put it, "myth-woven and elf-patterned." (The Inklings, p. 46) It then followed for Tolkien, and this is the argument that eventually convinced Lewis of the truth of Tolkien's statements concerning myths, that since man is of God and ultimately not a liar, man's works and ideas reflect eternal truth. Man might pervert his thoughts into lies, and this became a central issue for Tolkien in The Lord of the Rings, but in the end since he comes from God not only his abstract thoughts but also his imaginative inventions must be true. In practicing mythopoeics, as Tolkien peopled his world with elves, goblins, and dragons, the sub-creator actually fulfills God's purpose. All myths, both pagan and Christian, are never just lies; there is always that element of truth in them.

"Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men." (Tolkien, The Two Towers, p. 41, hereafter as TT) For Tolkien, good and evil struggles for supremacy until the end of things, and it is that struggle which is the story of The Lord of the Rings. Reflecting Christian myth, evil is strong because it always comes from good, but it is always misshapen, a perversion of God and His creation.

Biblical eschatology and Providence are Christian myths which are interlinked. The first is a study of and a recognition of endings -- death, judgement, heaven and hell, and the second is faith in the ultimate divine control over the whole of history. Since eschatological myths forecast an end, that is accepted. For Tolkien, Providence supports hope for the consummation of all things. Both eschatology and Providence also presuppose certain notions about time and its function in the history of the world. The Lord of the Rings contains an analogical world in its third age. These ages, Tolkien makes it clear, are not chronological successions or inevitable evolutions. They are also not cyclical in nature having no mythological pattern of eternal recurrence. Each age constitutes a kairos, a time of opportunity and fulfillment. Time, then, consists of a continuum of times, each with its own character, significance, and purpose. As Gandalf says, "Other evils there are that may come, yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succor of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have in not ours to rule." (The Return of the King, p. 155 hereafter as RK)

By the time of the third age, that weather is threatening. Gandalf recognizes that the struggle between Sauron and the ring-bearer is both decisive and cosmic in scope, and this is the image of the Biblical Apocalypse. It is both an end and a crisis. It is characterized, as it is in Revelations, by apostasy. In Middle-earth, Boromir, Denethor, and even Saruman represent this falling away from goodness. In addition

to apostasy, the final times are full of intense suffering for the faithful who are often drawn toward despair. The chief architect of their torment in the Christian myth is the Antichrist. Sauron is Tolkien's version of that "monster of iniquity, who will treacherously attack his weak unsuspecting neighbors, but who will be smitten and destroyed by the power of God in a resounding disaster." (H.H. Rowley, The Relevance of Apocalyptic, p. 32)

The happy ending of Tolkien's myth is accomplished by a kind of four headed composite hero: Gandalf, Aragorn, Frodo, and Sam. Gandalf has the power of good in his whiteness purified in his struggle with the Balrog. Aragorn has the kingly qualities necessary for the rider upon the white horse in the nineteenth chapter of Revelation. Frodo is the one called to suffer, the Christ-like figure who is sure of his end but not quite sure of his abilities. Sam's part in the downfall of evil turns our attention away from the apocalyptic images and suggests that ultimately the world may be saved not just by the overwhelming grace and power of God but by a grace that is simple and humble in its redemptive suffering.

Aragorn, however, is also the anciently promised one, the kingly incarnation of Christ. He is the constant reminder of the glory that is to come in the end of time. Not only is he strong in battle, but he is also, as Legolas and Gimli witness, the King of the Dead. At Minas Tirith he also fulfills another fragment of the ancient myth by bringing back Faramir, Bowyn, and Merry from the brink of death. When the White Crown is finally placed on his head, it is clear to all that he is revealed for what he is, and Tolkien's description of the event is messianic in its imagery.

Tall as the sea-kings of old, he stood above all that were near; ancient of days he seemed and yet in the flower of manhood; and wisdom sat upon his brow, and strength and healing were in his hands, and a light was about him. And then Faramir said: "Behold the King!" (RK, p. 246)

Tolkien gives us an even more significant basis for hope in the pattern of little victories which prefigure good's ultimate triumph. Tom Bombadil's rescue of the Hobbits from the barrow-wights, the Old Forest, Mount Caradhras, Fangorn, Helm's Deep, Isengard, the Pelennor Fields, Cirith Ungol and the Black Gate of Mordor and Mount Doom itself all are structured in the same mythic manner. Despair is abruptly transformed into joy by a sudden and unexpected display of power, either the power of Tom or Treebeard or Aragorn or most often Gandalf. It is the wizard who offers the best hope because he has been purified in his movement from Gandalf the Grey to Gandalf the White. The supreme miracle of Gandalf becomes the sign of signs that the apocalypse is at hand and that he is ready to play his providential role. In Khazad-dum the Balrog drags Gandalf down "far, far below the deepest delvings of the Dwarves," where "the world is gnawed by nameless things" of which even Sauron the Dark Lord does not know. Then Gandalf pursues the Balrog to the highest peak, Durin's Tower, and is able to cast him down. Finally darkness takes Gandalf, and he dies. The great miracle is that he returns from the dead, is healed in Lothlorien, and then reappears to Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli. Aragorn cries, "Gandalf! Beyond all hope you return to us in our need!" (TT, p. 98) "The Dark Lord has Nine: But we have One, mightier than they: the White Rider. He has passed through the fire and the abyss, and they

shall fear him. We will go where he leads." (TT, p. 104) Pippen, who despaired in Minas Tirith says: "No, my heart will not yet despair. Gandalf fell and has returned and is with us." (RK, p. 39)

Both kinds of hope, the kind Aragorn and Merry feel in the fiction and the kind the reader feels outside the story, are based upon the faith in the old myths that is based upon faith alone. In The Lord of the Rings, hope springs from the un-hoped for return of Gandalf which is clearly analogous to the hope which Christians base on God's mightiest act, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Gandalf consequently parallels the Christus Victor of classical Christology, a conception rooted in the apocalyptic image of the Son of man, coming in power and glory and winning the victory over the devil and his powers. The death of this Christ would not primarily be the Son's offering a sacrifice to the Father but his entering the darkness where man is imprisoned and freeing him by defeating the primal enemies, sin and death.

Considered allegorically, The Lord of the Rings speaks not only of the nature of the struggle against evil, the inescapability of involvement, the necessity for freedom, the stuff of heroism, and the possibility for significant loss within the struggle. It also vehemently declares that hope is a viable alternative in the face of evil. The several mini-triumphs culminate in the happiest of endings. Frodo and Sam achieve their quest and wake in the sweet air of Ithilien. They see Gandalf again as well as their other friends. They are glorified in word and song, a minstrel of Gondor having composed and performed the lay of Frodo and the Nine Fingers and the Ring of Doom. It is left for Sam, the commoner in the aforementioned quadripartite hero, to put the event into words that can be understood and appreciated. We are told that Sam "laughed aloud for sheer delight, and he stood up and cried: 'O great glory and splendor! And all my wishes have come true!' And then he wept." (RK, 232) Tolkien has termed this kind of happy ending the eucatastrophe. It is a sudden and joyous turn of events that gives only a fleeting glimpse of a joy which goes beyond the sense of awe and wonder aroused by the successful fantasy story. It is rather analogous to the joy in the birth of Christ, which is the eucatastrophe of the story of the incarnation.

The metaphor for Charles Williams was power. The end was a result of the conflict between the two powerful opposite poles. Good and evil, for Williams, constantly struggled to manipulate occult forces, to transcend the limitations of time and space, to control matter, through mind, and to discover the secrets of life and death.

All of William's novels are attempts at bypassing allegory and creating myth, especially the myths in the first three chapters in Genesis. The Place of the Lion, for example is a parable of ontology, and this is one aspect which differentiates Williams from his friend Tolkien. Rather than exploring Biblical eschatology, Williams writes parables of both creative and miscreative knowing. His fiction, then, is his interpretation or reinterpretation of the Genesis myth. The ontology which is presupposed in William's novels is partly derived from and inherent in the dogmatic formulations to which he subscribes and how he reads them. His theology as emphasized in his fictions is not discovery but rather the communication of received truth. He is thus closer to the Greek church fathers than to the Latins who stressed a moral duality of sin and healing grace. In direct contrast to Lewis, Wil-

liams was attracted to monism. The primary evidence of this for Williams was his belief that the great truth is that existence is inherently good and must be known as good. Worked out consistently as it is in the novels, this view makes it particularly difficult to deal rationally or even adequately with evil and suffering and the reality of human sinfulness. He is thus cognizant of the power of darkness, but, as Lewis often pointed out, this knowledge bred in Williams a skepticism and pessimism not found in the work of his fellow inklings.

For Charles Williams, sin is perceiving the good as evil. If this is true, then according to William's ontological structure, redemption is not just knowledge, but a reorientation of that knowledge. In the typical Williams novel, there is first and foremost a power, neither good nor evil, that makes itself felt. That ultimate power is grace which also contains the terror that is inseparable from the good. Next, a man either confirms or denies his own self-centered immediacy and is directed by the supernatural into a true knowledge of the total coinherent pattern of things or he is consigned to his own damnation. Whichever, he has chosen the path himself. What Williams finally says about good and evil is that all human beings are totally dependent on each other, that Donne was certainly right that "no man is an island," and that each thought and action has a bearing on other people; consequently, even evil actions will produce good and many good things will lead to evil. In every piece of human endeavor and human behavior there is an enormous potential for both good and evil. His romantic theology, as it has been called, pointed the way to affirmation through love as opposed to the asceticism of accepted theologians. In addition he took literally the meaning of the crucifixion; that is, by taking on the sins of the world, Christ pointed the way for mankind. Each of us can substitute for and pass on our burdens and pain to our fellow man.

The fantasies of Tolkien, Lewis, and Williams have a significance much beyond what they tell of each of these Oxford Christian's views of sin, death, judgment, good and evil. Not only do they create fantasies of the first sort, worlds alive with imaginative beings, places, and times but also, through their belief in and support of the myths of our pagan and Christian past, they create fantasies of another ilk, their universes alive with myth and meaning.

Works Cited

- Carpenter, Humphrey. The Inklings. New York: Ballantine Books, 1981.
 Lewis, C.S. Out of the Silent Planet. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1965.
 _____. Perelandra. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1965.
 _____. That Hideous Strength. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1965.
 Rowley, H.H. The Relevance of Apocalyptic. London: Lutterworth Press, 1944.
 Tolkien, J.R.R. The Fellowship of the Ring. New York: Ballantine Books, 1978.
 _____. The Two Towers. New York: Ballantine Books, 1978.
 _____. The Return of the King. New York: Ballantine Books, 1978.

Other Works Consulted:

- Hillegas, Mark, ed. Shadows of Imagination. Carbondale. Southern Illinois University Press, 1979.

Continued on page 17

hrossa, are to me the main thing that happened" (135); and in the book's last pages he describes the ways of life and death in this primitivistic utopia. Rather than go into specific details of his gradual education here, I move to the climax of this act, the hnakra-hunt.

The hunt brings about a change for the better in Ransom, but the moral nature of the event is complex. Even as they prepare for the hunt, Ransom feels how much he has already changed:

A short time ago, in England, nothing would have seemed more impossible to Ransom than to accept the post of honor and danger in an attack upon an unknown but certainly deadly aquatic monster. Even more recently, when he had first fled from the sorns, or when he had lain pitying himself in the forest by night, it would hardly have been in his power to do what he was intending to do to-day.... Perhaps... there was something in the air he now breathed, or in the society of the hrossa, which had begun to work a change in him.

(77)

Exhibiting sufficient bravery in the fight with the hnakra, Ransom achieves a new sense of manhood. At the same time, he feels a new oneness with the hrossa; they are all hnua, all rational animals, Ransom as well as Hyoi. At this point the narrator says of Ransom, "He had grown up" (81). It is a major accomplishment in the enfance of Elwin Ransom.

But this is where the moral complexity comes in. In saying "He had grown up," is the narrator only indicating Ransom's view of the experience at that moment? If so, a rifle shot shatters our unqualified acceptance of his view. Hyoi's death, says Whin, comes from their not having obeyed the eldil's command to send Ransom to the Oyarsa immediately (83). The command came before the hnakra attacked; Ransom and the others all chose to fight it instead of retreating to put Ransom ashore. Now Ransom feels terribly guilty about Hyoi's death. Was the killing of the hnakra, then, a bad act instead of a good one? Did Ransom thereby grow up, or did he indeed fall down? It is a difficult question. It is these events to which the Oyarsa will refer later, in Meldilorn: "I sent my eldil to fetch you," he will say to Ransom, "but still you would not come... and hnau's blood has been shed" (120).

Good does come from these climatic events among the hrossa. As Ransom leaves them behind to make his way to the Oyarsa, he determines to obey the eldila from now on rather than to trust his own judgement (85). This resolution stands him in good stead during his arduous climb up the mountains and on to Meldilorn. This change in attitude strikes me as more important than his Conradian courage in the hnakra-kill. Not that the courage is unimportant. As he climbs he contemplates the changes within himself, contrasting that initial terror, self-pity, and lack of direction when he first escaped Weston and Devine, with his current well-being and sense of duty; he feels confidence and even pleasure (86-87).

Ransom reaches his third milestone through the help of the sorns. Augray especially teaches Ransom many things about Maleldil's system; whereas he had feared these giant creatures from the beginning, Ransom has now turned a corner in his attitude toward

sorns (97, 101). They will occasionally and understandably startle him with their looks, but he continues to learn from their unfallen reason. He gains from them a new perspective on truth as he learns more about Mars/Malacandra and how it contrasts with Earth in the number of rational species, etc. He is being re-educated -- shaken out of his Earth-bound, twentieth-century views. If we don't push the divisions too far, we can say that among the hrossa Ransom's heart matures and among the sorns his head matures.

In the heavens, among the hrossa, and with the seroni, Ransom has learned and changed. The fourth milestone for this pilgrim is Meldilorn, the holy island of the Oyarsa, the chief eldil of the planet. This milestone does not mark another change in Ransom, but it shows how much he has changed.

Much of the difference is indicated in brief in his reply to the Oyarsa's accusation that he has fearfully avoided this meeting: "That is true, Oyarsa. Bent creatures are full of fears. But I am here now and ready to know your will with me" (122). In the climactic events that ensue, Ransom contrasts most favorably with Weston, in everything from linguistic ability to basic goodness on Malacandra combine in those marvelous translations he makes of Weston's speech to the Oyarsa (e.g., 135-36). Hemingway once said that what a good writer needs most is a reliable, built-in crap detector. Ransom has developed one on Malacandra and accordingly cuts Weston's speech to its real meaning.

Phase one of Ransom's pilgrimage soon ends. The heavenly powers help the trio return safely to Earth. They have been gone nine months, and the strain puts Ransom in the hospital for the next three months (That Hideous Strength 231, 232). But otherwise the trip has done him great good, and the difference will be apparent in Perelandra, the second volume in the pilgrimage of Elwin Ransom.

Works Cited

- Green, Roger Lancelyn, and Walter Hooper. C.S. Lewis: A Biography. 1974. New York: Harvest-Harcourt, 1976.
- Lewis, C.S. Out of the Silent Planet. 1938. New York: Macmillan, 1965.
- . Perelandra. 1943. New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1962.
- . That Hideous Strength. 1945. New York: Macmillan, 1965.
- . The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses. 1949. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965.
- Pope, Alexander. Selected Poetry and Prose. Ed. William K. Wimsatt, Jr. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951.



The Nature of Evil, continued from page 13

- Manlove, C.N. The Impulse of Fantasy Literature. Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1983.
- . Modern Fantasy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Sale, Roger. Modern Heroism. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.
- Urang, Gunnar. Shadows of Heaven. Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1971.